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Think outside the chocolate box

By Kristen Cox Roby For The New Mexican

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Gruet Winery's Sauvage Rose (\$20) is a bone-dry pinot noir sparkling rosé made in the méthode Champenoise.

Courtesy photo

Nothing says Valentine's Day like a box of truffles and a dozen roses. But it's worth thinking outside the chocolate box every once in a while. Santa Fe is blessed with so many local shops where you can discover something sweet, something pink or something effervescent to put a special twist on your Valentine's gift-giving. Here are a few suggestions:

Henry and the Fish, which opened in June next to the Lensic Performing Arts Center downtown, already is building a reputation for its signature freshbaked goods, including quiches, cookies, scones and coffee cake. For Valentine's, owners Kelly and Joe Garcia will be offering two kinds of cupcakes — vanilla raspberry with rose buttercream and chocolate with white chocolate buttercream — decorated with chocolate X's and O's (four for \$16 or \$46 for a dozen), and a mixed box of chocolate-covered strawberries (six for \$18).

Want a more personal touch? They'll personalize a miniature chocolate or vanilla cake for two with your special message on top (proposal plans, anyone?). That's \$18 for a six-inch single-layer cake.

Henry and the Fish is also selling do-it-yourself cookie-decorating kits, with four heart-shaped sugar cookies with pink and red royal icing in icing bags ready for piping and Valentine's-themed sprinkles.

"It's just something different and fun," Joe Garcia said. "It's a great gift for a child, but adults would have fun, too."

All the goodies, by the way, come in kraft paper boxes with holiday ribbon. They require about two hours' notice, but order by 4 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11, to pick up by 4 p.m. on Valentine's Day.

While you're stopping by to pick up or order, try some coffee, a smoothie or specialty drink like the lavender oat milk matcha made with ArtfulTea matcha and Los Poblanos lavender. Or grab a salad, grain bowl, soup, all-day breakfast or Albuquerque's Van Rixel Bros. gelato from the dipping case.

And soon, the eatery will offer downtown delivery.

(Henry and the Fish: 217 W. San Francisco St.; winter hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday; 505-995-1191.)

Speaking of **ArtfulTea**, a tin or two of looseleaf from this Marcy Street shop would make a thoughtful gift for a significant other, co-worker, teacher or other special someone. Owner Karen Gardiner offered several Valentine's-appropriate choices from among the store's more than 90 kinds of loose-leaf tea:

- Summer Romance black and green tea blend (\$14 for 4 ounces) features sweet papaya and strawberries intertwined with black and green teas (and a lovely name, to boot).
- Midnight Rose organic black tea (\$14 for 3 ounces) has red rose petals that help create an aromatic, flavorful cup with a sweet, floral character.

- Rose Petal Raspberry herbal tea (\$16 for 3 ounces) is an aromatic blend of fruit and rose petals.
- Chocolate Strawberry organic herbal tea (\$14 for 4 ounces) offers a classic flavor combination with a blend of fruits, flowers and cocoa peels.

(ArtfulTea: 101 W. Marcy St.; open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday; 505-795-7724; artfultea.com.)

On the other side of the Plaza down Burro Alley is a jewel-box sized bakery proving big things come in small packages. Pick your sweetheart up a pack of pretty macarons from **B&B Bakery**. The delicate cookies are \$12 for six and \$24 for 12 and come in 12 flavors, from green tea and lemon to caramel and hazelnut. A box of red-and-pink raspberry and red velvet macarons would be an especially fetching holiday assortment.

(B&B Bakery: 38 Burro Alley; open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday; 213-369-1604.)

For a different kind of sweet, stop in at the **Santa Fe Honey Sal3n & Farm Shop**, where you can choose from a wide range of local and exotic raw, extra-virgin and unfiltered honeys in flavors including desert wildflower, orange blossom and wild blackberry. Honeys are \$15 for 4 ounces, \$24 for a half-pint and \$45 for a quart.

(Santa Fe Honey Sal3n & Farm Shop: 554 Juanita St.; open from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday and by appointment; 505-780-8797; santafehoney.com.)

Honeymoon Brewery has romance built right into the name, so a few bottles of the Santa Fe shop's hard kombucha would make for a charming gift. They offer four styles in 12-ounce (\$5.50) and 17-ounce (\$7.99) bottles: Blanco (ginger and lemon), Piedra (stonefruit medley), Cereza Negra (tart cherry) and La Moneda (Himalayan salt, lime and grapefruit).

Honeymoon's gluten-free kombucha is made from high-quality organic teas and sugars and clocks in at 5 percent alcohol by volume. The bottles are made from 80 percent recycled European glass; bring them back for a 5-cents return so they can be repurposed into votives and drinking glasses with the help of a local glass blower — and then stick around for a date in the elegant taproom.

(HoneyMoon Brewery: 907 W. Alameda St., Unit B, in the Solana Center; taproom open from 3 to 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and from 3 to 8 p.m. Sunday, and to-go-only sales are available from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday; 505-303-3139; honeymoonbrewery.com. Bottles also sold at Whole Foods Market and Susan's Fine Wines & Spirits.)

If you're looking for a more traditional bubbly, think pink. Justin Pichardo, the manager at **Gruet Winery's** Santa Fe tasting room, recommends Gruet's Sauvage Rose (\$20). It's a bone-dry pinot noir sparkling rosé made in the méthode Champenoise.

"It is one of our most popular styles and something that pairs great with a variety of foods," Pichardo said. Expect flavors of wild strawberry and a hint of cherry, complemented by bright acidity.

(Gruet Winery Santa Fe Tasting Room: 210 Don Gaspar Ave., in Hotel St. Francis; open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday, from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and from noon to 8 p.m. Sunday; 505-989-9463; gruetwinery.com.)

Another pretty-in-pink selection: At **Santa Fe Olive Oil & Balsamic Co.**, pick up a bottle of Rosé Condimento Balsamic (\$24 for a 375 mL bottle), which is made from the pinot nero (pinot noir) grape variety and offers a bright acidity and soft, subtle aromas of crab apple, watermelon, raspberries, strawberries and wet stone, according to its tasting notes. Then use it to whip up a romantic meal together — make a salad dressing by combining it with the shop's Meyer Lemon Extra Virgin Olive Oil (\$24) or create a meat marinade by fusing it with Black Truffle Dark Balsamic (\$30).

Another rich and romantic option: the Raspberry Dark Balsamic (\$24), which blends Italian raspberry purée and a traditional 18-year-style dark balsamic base. Pour it over vanilla ice cream or gelato for a decidedly grown-up indulgence.

The store also carries smaller 60 mL bottles for \$10 perfect for mixing and matching into gift sets of two, four or six. Visit the downtown store or the website to order.

(Santa Fe Olive Oil & Balsamic Co.: 116 Don Gaspar Ave.; open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; 505-922-1601; santafeoliveoil.com.)